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## **LBT to begin talks with homeowners for beach access**

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LONG BEACH TOWNSHIP - Long Beach Township and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers officials said Tuesday that negotiations will take place over the next eight weeks about where, and more importantly how, seven public access ways will be incorporated into the Loveladies and North Beach section of town.

Of 156 public entrances to Long Beach Township's 11 miles of beach, only "five or six" of them are currently in the northern part of the township that includes the two wealthy communities.

That issue has to be resolved before construction on the 50-year, \$50-million beach replenishment LBI Project takes place, according to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The project calls for the corps to add a permanent berm to the badly eroded barrier island.

Federal funding for beach replenishment depends upon complete public access to beaches, specifically stipulating that parking must be made available within a quarter-mile of any beach destination.

Both the township and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers commented Tuesday about a 1999 U.S. Army Corps of Engineers report that designated seven public access ways that need to be added to Loveladies and North Beach - in between the lots of multimillion dollar homes.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers said that the routes were still being finalized.

Both called getting easements for those access ways a "challenge," most notably created by the cost that it might take to convince wealthy property owners to give up portions of their land, and/or private driveways.

If the homeowners do not willingly sell the needed land to the township, Mayor James J. Mancini said that "condemnation" would be the only other alternative for the town, so that it can come under compliance with the LBI Project.

Mancini said that the town hasn't yet talked to any of the homeowners that will be affected by the proposed routes.

The longtime mayor said that those conversations would take place within a month.

Mancini said that he dreaded "condemnation" most of all, where the township may have to then purchase the land back from New Jersey courts.

"That's a dirty word," U.S. Army Corps of Engineers engineer Paul Gaudini said Tuesday, knowing the possible expense of that process.

Gaudini said that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers would "support" the township in trying to come under compliance, but ultimately coming to agreements with landowners "was a local matter."

"It may be a tough one," Gaudini said.

Making it possibly tougher, especially in the face of potential litigation that Mancini said he fears, is that the township may only have one year to resolve the matter with seven different property owners.

Jeff Sagnip Hollendonner a spokesman for U.S. Rep. Jim Saxton, R-3rd, said that the timeline to start the LBI Project was fall 2004.

He said that Saxton would proceed with shoring up the funding while Long Beach Township solved its access issue.

Hollendonner said that he expected the funding to be there shortly, and didn't blame Long Beach Township's heretofore non-compliance for the last funding snub.

Hollendonner said that that strictly had to do with Congress bypassing new project starts.

That has not dulled the criticism surrounding Long Beach Township's noncompliance however.

The township promised the DEP and deputy attorney general to immediately open up Loveladies to the public 12 years ago.

Following on the heels of sniping by residents for years over the issue, state Department of Environmental Protection Commissioner Bradley Campbell and Beach Haven Mayor Deb Whitcraft recently lambasted Long Beach Township's inaction.

Mancini has stated that he would not spend the money to truly open up that section of town without funding for the LBI Project first being approved.

Mancini remained defiant Tuesday.

"We have very few day-trippers to that part of the island," Mancini said.

He said that the township would comply so as to fall in line with the LBI Project, but he was against adding access to that part of the island because it was unnecessary.

"We don't really need it," Mancini said.

"This thing is a complete waste of money," he said